

**PREPARED REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN JULIUS GENACHOWSKI
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**

8th ANNUAL 9-1-1 HONORS GALA

**WASHINGTON, D.C.
MARCH 29, 2011**

Thank you to the E9-1-1 Institute, 9-1-1- for Kids, NENA, APCO, NASNA, 9IA, and NAED.

Being with you feels very familiar to me. It's been a while, but I was a certified EMT, and actually taught CPR.

This was while I was in college, and I worked with the Columbia Area Volunteer Ambulance.

To make a little spending money, I also worked for a private ambulance service in New York City.

Now that was something. One of the drivers I worked with loved nothing more than driving the wrong way up one-way avenues in Manhattan.

I decided that law and business might be a wiser career path for me.

But I've always admired – deeply admired – the men and women who made emergency response their career choice.

Thank you to all of you here tonight for dedicating your careers to helping others and saving lives.

I also congratulate all those being recognized for their heroic work.

Back when I was an EMT, the big change in technology was from rotary phones to push button.

The communications world has changed in so many dramatic ways since then – mobile phones, the Internet -- and that change has accelerated in recent years.

In 2005, not that many Americans sent text messages, and the average cell phone subscriber sent around less than two texts a day. Today, it's about 20 texts a day.

And the average teenager sends over 100 a day. That tells us something about the direction this is going.

In 2005, only 18% of U.S. cell phones had cameras. Now almost all of them do. And a growing number can also shoot video.

This all confirms what I suspect most of us see with our own families. Five years ago, my teenage son didn't text. Now, it seems like he and his friends don't do much else.

Five years ago, my mother didn't know how to take pictures with her phone and zap them to her grandson. Now she does.

Five years ago, if I'd told people you can't text 9-1-1 or send pictures to 9-1-1. They would have said, so what?

Today, they think I can't be serious. How could that be?

But as you all know that's the sad truth. There's a gap between what ordinary people do every day with communications technology, and the capabilities of our emergency response network.

That gap is unacceptable. That gap costs lives.

Think about it. Why do most parents finally relent and get their kids their first cell phones? For safety. How do kids primarily use those phones to communicate? They text. Yet, if your kid winds up in an emergency situation and texts 9-1-1 for help, that call for help will go unanswered.

If someone witnesses a crime, takes a picture and tries to send it, the 9-1-1 call center can't receive it.

If a deaf person wants to communicate with 9-1-1 using text, she can't.

It makes no sense it all.

Now, make no mistake, 9-1-1 and our emergency response network are a remarkable success story. You handle 650,000 calls a day.

You've done your best to take advantage of new technology – for example, implementing enhanced 9-1-1, which allows call centers to immediately identify the location of the caller.

But today's 9-1-1 system still doesn't support the communication tools of tomorrow. No texts to 9-1-1. No pictures. No video. There's no excuse.

We have to change.

We're doing everything we can at the FCC.

As recommended in the National Broadband Plan, we've initiated a proceeding to ensure that the public has access to broadband technologies to communicate with 9-1-1 dispatchers and to accelerate the deployment of next generation 9-1-1.

We've issued an order to improve 9-1-1 by enhancing location-accuracy requirements for wireless service providers to be sure first responders can find those who call 9-1-1 from their mobile phones.

And next month, I will ask my colleagues to consider at the Commission's open meeting a proposal to help improve the reliability and resiliency of our emergency response infrastructure.

All of these efforts are being driven by Admiral Jamie Barnett and the outstanding staff we have working on public safety issues at the FCC. Let's thank them for their service, and their excellent work.

Now, if this award is meant to indicate that we at the FCC have accomplished our task, I can't accept it.

But on behalf of all of us at the FCC I take this award as a challenge to do everything in our power to harness the power of technology to save lives.

Let me close with a story.

Last year, I visited a 9-1-1 call center in Arlington, Virginia. During my visit, one of the officers made a point of pulling me aside. He told me, "A lot of people think we don't get it when it comes to the latest technology – that we don't want change. That's just wrong. No one wants it more than we do."

What I said to him then, is what I want to say to all of you tonight. We're going to get there.

Our first responders are American heroes, and we're committed to work together with you to build a 21st century 9-1-1 network so you can do your jobs and save lives. Working together, we're going to build a safer America.

We're going to get there.

Thank you.